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AUTHOR Schaible, Lynn Zoch; Russell, Maria P.
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ABSTRACT

A study examined whether women who teach public relations are satisfied in their teaching careers. Subjects, 113 women faculty teaching public relations, responded to a survey on satisfaction and morale, as well as to questions about the respondents' plans for the future. Results indicated that women who are currently teaching public relations in American colleges and universities are very satisfied with the classroom experience, the lifestyle that academic life affords, and the psychic rewards that accompany teaching, but less satisfied with many of the institutional and administrative components of their career choice. (Ten tables of data are included, and 13 references are appended.) (MS)

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WHAT DO WOMEN WANT?

A SURVEY REPORT ON THE SATISFACTION LEVELS OF WOMEN IN PUBLIC RELATIONS EDUCATION

Lynn Zoch Schaible, Doctoral Student
and Maria P. Russell, Assistant Professor
S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications
Syracuse University

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REASON FOR THE STUDY

As the number of young women undertaking the study of journalism and mass communication in our schools swells nationwide - up to 60% in a recent study (Peterson, 1988) - the role of female faculty members has come under increasing study. And nowhere is this better illustrated than in the field of public relations where female students outnumber males by a ratio of two to one (Peterson, 1988).

By the time of the 1983 National Convention of the Association for Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC), a task force had already been formed to recruit women and minorities into public relations teaching positions. The task force had noted that, nationally, there was a 60 to 40 percent membership ratio of women to men in the Public Relations Society of America, and that while women formed more than a majority of the majors in public relations programs, these students seldom would find women standing in front of their classrooms as role models. The task force concluded that recruiting more women into teaching would enhance the educational experience for students, and that if more women and minorities chose teaching careers, public relations students would be better prepared to work with people of the opposite sex and of different races.

In 1984, on behalf of the task force, Elizabeth Lance Toth

conducted the first survey of women across the United States then teaching public relations courses in colleges and universities. Her purpose was to learn why these women had chosen an academic career.

Five years later, the concern of this study is the question of whether these women are satisfied in the teaching careers that they have chosen. It looks at those women who have entered the arena of academia, specifically in the field of public relations, but drawing on comparative findings in other areas of journalism and mass communication. Specifically it asks women faculty members the questions: Why did you choose teaching as a career, and how important is your teaching to you? What areas of your work do you find most, and least, satisfying to you? How do you perceive the faculty morale at your school? Do you see differences between male and female faculty members in terms of success and respect? What are your plans for the future?

BACKGROUND AND METHODS

The current study is based on information collected in a broader survey, sponsored by the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC), of women teaching public relations in journalism and mass communication schools nationwide. This survey was conducted in late 1988 and early 1989 as a continuing analysis of the careers of women who teach public relations. It was patterned after the 1984 study by Toth, which touched

peripherally on some of the issues that these women found satisfying in that career.

In order to delve further into what women feel and think about their work, the 1988-89 survey included specific questions relating to satisfaction and morale, as well as questions about the respondents' plans for the future.

The names of women teaching public relations were obtained from deans, directors and department chairs identified through the latest available editions of Where to Study Public Relations (Hesse, Kendall and Terhune, 1986) and the Journalism and Mass Communication Directory (AEJMC, 1988). By employing both an initial mail questionnaire and follow-up phone calls, we received responses from all 228 administrators identified. From these initial contacts with administrators we obtained the names of 190 women whom the administrators claimed filled the criteria of teaching public relations full or part-time.

Two complete mailings and a reminder postcard were sent out over a period of three months. From the 190 original names, five were returned as undeliverable after two attempts at mailing, and 10 were disqualified either because the women identified themselves as adjuncts, or because they were wrongly identified through their schools as teaching public relations. Received back from this final number of 175 women faculty teaching public relations were 113 responses, for a response rate of 64.5 percent.

COMPARABILITY TO ALL WOMEN TEACHING COMMUNICATION

The women who responded to the current survey show a similar demographic profile to respondents in other recent surveys of faculty in journalism and mass communication programs, but are perhaps a bit older than the typical female respondent from other communication areas identified in earlier studies.

The typical respondent to the current survey is a white woman between 40-49 years of age, who has been teaching public relations courses at a college or university for less than five years. She is an untenured assistant professor earning between $25-29,000 annually. This educator holds a master's degree, and before entering teaching had at least ten years' experience as a practitioner. She typically belongs to AEJMC and Public Relations Society of America (PRSA). She is involved in communication research, and has published her findings, as well as presented them at conferences or professional meetings.

Similarly, an earlier study in 1983 (Sharp, 1985) found the typical female educator to be slightly younger, at 38-years-old, but also an untenured assistant professor with a master's degree. Those same women, six years later, would be within the age range found to be typical in the current study. She earned an average of $21,150 per year. The 1983 respondents, who came from all fields of journalism and mass communication, were more likely to

teach courses in print journalism, but they also had nine years of experience outside of teaching. These respondents too belonged to AEJMC and one other organization. As in the current study, the 1983 respondent was likely to have engaged in scholarly activities, and to have published and presented papers.

A more recent study (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1988) which looked not just at women, but all educators in journalism and mass communication, did not analyze most variables by gender. The study, however, reported a similar finding for the women surveyed, who comprised 20.4 percent of the respondents, in terms of academic rank. Other findings, which were aggregated without regard for gender, showed the typical respondent having an average age of 46, a PhD (contrary to the findings of the two studies based solely on women), and experience in the field of 6.5 years for those with a doctorate, and 12 years for those without.

The current study, compiled from information received from women teaching primarily public relations courses, shows few demographic differences from the two previous studies which used a more variable population in terms of respondents' background and courses taught.

FINDINGS

The form taken by most of the survey questions on satisfaction and morale was that of a system of rankings. Women

were asked to rank their top three or bottom three (in this case with "1" being their least satisfying) areas. Questions were asked about academic life and environment, current job, perceptions of male versus female faculty successes, level of morale with a department or unit, and reasons for choosing teaching as a career. Respondents were also asked about which factors would be most influential to them in deciding to change teaching jobs. In addition, questions were posed about past or future changes. Following are the findings of that study.

Choice of, and importance of teaching as a career

Women public relations faculty enter teaching primarily for the intellectual and personal freedom that it allows them. The "academic lifestyle" was cited most frequently, with 66 women, or 58 percent, choosing it as one of their top three choices. Sixteen percent chose it as their top reason for entering teaching. "Amount of autonomy" was the second most frequent reason, with fourteen percent choosing it as their main reason, and 41.5 percent choosing it as one of their top three reasons for entering college or university teaching. "Intellectual life" was third, with 39 women, or 34.5 percent choosing it as their reason for entering academia.

Fifteen of the women chose the open-ended "other" category as one or more of their top three choices. While some put into their own words one of the listed choices, for example "flex hours", most cited their personal feelings about teaching - "my

heart is in the classroom, I love teaching"; "it's my interest and my strength"; "I got a 'high' from teaching as an adjunct"; and "it answered the question 'what did I want to do when I was 50'." Enjoying students and interactions with students also rated high with the women surveyed.

In contrast, the category "financial rewards" was chosen by no one, with several of the women writing "you've got to be kidding!" or something similar after the choice.

In contrast to the diversity of reasons for entering the field, the women proved nearly unanimous in their current feelings about their teaching. When asked how important college or university teaching was to them, 87 percent said it was moderately or very important to them, and 11 percent indicated their teaching to be an essential part of their lives.

Satisfaction and Morale

Four questions were devoted to the area of what the women found most or least satisfying about their careers, and two questions to the perceived level of faculty morale in their schools or units.

The responses not only duplicated the women's reasons for entering teaching in the first place, but supported the findings of earlier studies that had also focused on faculty satisfaction.

When looking at the concepts of satisfaction and morale, it must be remembered that it is often the faculty perception of these concepts that have the impact, and not the organizational

reality. As Bowen and Schuster (1986) wrote

> The people who make up the organization may experience it in ways that are not easy to square with the 'objective' reality of the printouts. It is the faculty's perceptions of their circumstances, however inconsonant these perceptions may be with the 'facts', which drive their responses to their environment, which determine how they behave and how they transmit the organization's culture to their colleagues, to their students, and to others. . .
>
> The faculty condition cannot be understood apart from the faculty's own perceptions of its condition. (p. 138)

Findings of a 1984 study of overall "campus mood" at 38 colleges and universities nationwide (Bowen and Schuster, 1986) turned up basically the same findings as did Weaver and Wilhoit (1988) in their study of journalism and mass communication faculty, and as did the current study. Faculty morale is perceived as being "middling" or "acceptable" in all studies.

Weaver and Wilhoit (1988) found that 41 percent of the respondents thought the morale was good and 29 percent found it fair, with only 17 percent replying "excellent" and 13 percent saying that the unit's morale was poor or very poor.

The current study had similar, although slightly more negative findings, with 38 percent of the women replying that faculty morale was good, and 39 percent calling it fair. The major differences occurred in the excellent and poor categories, where only 5 percent of the women termed their unit's morale as excellent, and 18 percent called it poor.

The Weaver and Wilhoit finding that "academic rank is related to perceived morale, with untenured assistant and associate

professors being a little less likely than their senior colleagues to see high morale" (1988, p. 23) was also upheld in the current study, but with assistant professors being much more likely to choose fair or poor, while associate professors chose good or fair.

Faculty morale, whether positive or negative can be attributed to many factors. Seven particularly influential factors were identified by Bowen and Schuster (1986). These are campus leadership, the role of external agencies, faculty compensation, adequacy or inadequacy of working conditions, shifting values and increasing demands placed on faculty, the perception of "stuckness" or career immobility, and what they termed the "phoenix factor" which is related to positive morale and involves coming through a serious crisis.

The reasons given by women in this survey included all of these and more, but the top reasons given for a fair or poor level of morale were "academic politics" and "salary." Those noting a good level were more likely to have chosen "leadership" and "collegiality and/or support of peers" as the reason.

Women checking "other" were more likely to note "people" factors when supporting a good faculty morale, with comments such as "smallness of department", "good spirited people who are secure," and "atmosphere for open discussion of conflicts/ resolutions". A fair or poor faculty morale was attributed to "disorganization within the department", "lack of knowledge about and support of mass communication" or "recent merger of two units

creating massive changes."

In terms of overall satisfaction, the respondents were asked to rank order those things that they found most or least satisfying about the academic environment in general, and also about their own current job.

Overwhelmingly, the women surveyed (88%) said that classroom teaching was their greatest personal satisfaction with their job, and 70 percent cited informal work with students as being one of the most satisfying aspects for them. This finding is supported by Weaver and Wilhoit who found that more than three-quarters of their sample of mass communication faculty found their greatest satisfaction in working with students. (1988, p. 24)

An interesting dichotomy occurred in terms of the women's responses to where "research and publishing" ranked in their level of satisfaction. Thirty-three percent of the women ranked it as one of their top three most satisfying aspects, while 42 percent ranked it as one of their bottom three, or <u>least</u> satisfying aspects of their work. In either case, the women surveyed are nevertheless conducting research and publishing it, with 69 percent saying that they participate in research, and 44 percent telling us that they have published their findings.

Another area of their own jobs from which the women derived the least satisfaction was administration or providing "administrative leadership". 57.5 percent of the women chose it as one of their three least satisfying activities, and 26.5 percent put it on the bottom. This general dislike for the

administrative aspects of teaching was also brought out in the 1985 study by Sharp, which pointed to the issue of the socialization process, whereby women have not prepared for the role. A quote from a male administrator interviewed in the Sharp study seems to summarize that attitude:

> "A lot of women that I know," he said, "seem genuinely horrified by the kind of job academic administration appears to be - that is, much less contact with students, much more paper shuffling, much more bureaucracy, much more interpersonal conflict (hiring and firing and telling people that they can't have what they want). When I meet with members of my faculty and say that, since I am not going to be chairman forever, I would like them to start thinking about replacing me at some point, all of them, male and female, run in horror at the thought. But it seems that the women run slightly faster." (p. 48)

Other areas of their work from which the women derived the least satisfaction were advising student organizations and professional/academic association work, each of which approximately 34 percent of the respondents rated as one of their least satisfying activities.

Looking at the broader area of satisfaction with the overall academic environment, the women reaffirmed those areas that had brought them to teaching in the first place. The top three areas chosen were flexible schedule (51%), academic lifestyle (50%) and amount of autonomy (49%). While only twelve women (10.6%) chose the "other" category, the reasons that they gave were also related to personal satisfactions. Intellectual challenge, "time to think", a chance to make a difference in the quality of education, summers off to pursue other interests, enhancement of professional skills, and working with or interaction with

students were some of the responses given.

The question relating to areas they found least satisfying focused on broader areas of the academic environment. For this question 49.5 percent of the respondents listed academic politics, with twenty of the women - more than any other category - naming it as the least satisfying aspect for them. Salary was checked by 43 percent, and administrative support by 40 percent of the respondents.

The answers received from those choosing "other" for this question were diverse, but perhaps telling of problems faced not just by women, but by many mass communication faculty members who had worked as professionals. Several women made comments similar to "lack of funds, yet misappropriation of same - disagree with priorities", and the frustration of the professional entering academia showed in the comment by one respondent who noted "general unbusinesslike atmosphere - can't anyone take a message?" This comparison to the business world was also made by a respondent who commented on the autonomy of her department, and wrote that "there's no continuity, sense of commonality of goals, shared experiences, no 'corporate culture'."

Others noted lack of funding for travel and conference attendance, poor library facilities or administrative indecisiveness. University administration received its share of criticism; one respondent noted accreditation requirements as a dissatisfaction; and the "pressure to maintain pace of research output" was also criticized.

Perceived success and respect of male versus female faculty members

In order to focus on the respondents' perceptions of their own positions as women faculty, and how they feel gender has affected their own career advancement, we asked the question "At your institution, do you perceive that male faculty members are more successful than female faculty members?" This questions was followed with "If YES, what are the reasons for this perception?(Rank the top 3)." An additional question focused on their perception of student respect toward male versus female faculty members.

Sixty-one percent of the women public relations faculty responding, or 66 women, perceived male faculty as being more successful. Of those 66 responding yes, 50 listed the "old boy network" as one of their top three reasons for this perception. Their feelings are reflected in some earlier studies where 59 percent of the respondents felt the results of subtle discriminatory attitudes (Sharp, 1985), or where a respondent cited a complaint with "the 'good old boyism' - the opportunities that come up, such as going to conventions, usually go to the men. Also, students seem to be more respectful of male faculty members" (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1985, p.26)

Many articles have been written about this insidious informal network that keeps women out, and in academe it forms a communication network that is the source of the social, political

and intellectual exchange needed for women to achieve and advance in their fields. Simeone (1987, p.84) writes that "being included in them may mean being aware of the latest developments in one's field, having one's work informally critiqued, knowing the latest gossip (the better to negotiate institutional politics), cultivating a research partner, receiving a job reference - all the helpful little opportunities that can add up to a career advantage." And Theodore (1986, p.31) tells us that what she calls the "buddy system" is "so entrenched in academia that some faculty find it difficult to perceive it as discriminatory against women and even boast about it publicly."

Whether or not it is admitted beyond the confines of a particular institution, this network exists, and the public relations women faculty surveyed perceive it as detrimental to both their advancement and respect in the academic environment.

After "old boy network" the two most often cited reasons for the perception that men are more successful than women faculty were appointments to faculty leadership positions, which 39 of the women chose, and rate of promotions granted, chosen by 28 of the women responding. Grunig (1987) has pointed out that the problems women face with promotions can be traced back to that same "old boy network" that our respondents recognized. Women have problems tapping into their department's informal networks, of fitting in; and so when tenure or promotion decisions are made, the committee, which may be composed solely of men, is more likely to render a negative verdict against someone who is not

like them, someone who is not perceived as collegial.

A study by Robbins and Kahn (1985, p. 7) also found that "women have more difficulty than men in achieving tenure and timely promotion, whether they are well-published and recognized scholars, or engaged primarily in teaching undergraduates."

Women who responded to the open-ended "other" frequently focused on hiring practices. Several women said that they were the only woman in their department or unit, one noted the greater number of women fired at her university, and one commented that "at times new male faculty are seemingly 'brought in' at higher pay than female - no solid 'proof' - but family support was mentioned as a concern re: one interviewee and pay."

Other issues mentioned were the greater number of males, and the fact that they've been in the academic field longer. One woman commented on differences in teaching loads and course selections, and another on her perception that men were more often granted course reductions for research. This perception was quantified by Kovar (1985) in an article on the scholarly productivity of female faculty.

Finally, the respondents were asked about their perceptions of student respect toward male and female faculty. Two-thirds of the respondents (67.6%) saw student respect as the same, regardless of gender. Of those who were conscious of a difference, 30.6 percent saw respect for male faculty as greater, while only 1.8% saw respect for female faculty as greater. Both the Sharp (1985) and the Weaver and Wilhoit (1988) studies

reported similar concerns of women faculty members and quote individual respondents who noted the difference.

Plans for the future

Five questions were devoted to the possibility of a job or career change. Although 76.6 percent of the women responding said that they had considered a change in their job within the past four years, slightly fewer than half (47.5%) of those contemplating a change had actually made one. And in keeping with their responses about the importance of teaching to them personally, only 16 women, or 19 percent of those responding, had considered a move out of the teaching profession. The very fact that they were answering a survey sent to women teaching public relations indicates that even if considering the move, they had decided not to make it.

These findings are supported by Bowen and Schuster (1986) who write:

> No single finding stands out so consistently across all thirty-eight campuses than the unwillingness of faculty to abandon their academic careers. They like their work, whatever its shortcomings. Indeed, many of them love their work. The vast majority of faculty, around 90 percent, indicated that they would choose the academic profession if they were starting over. (p.158)

Looking ahead toward the next five years, sixty percent of the respondents saw themselves staying in the teaching profession. Others were contemplating the move into educational administration (5%), practicing public relations and teaching

(4%), or retiring (4%). It appears that the same women who had contemplated moving out of teaching in the past are still considering the move, however, because 19 percent of those responding saw themselves moving out of the teaching field altogether, and into, or back into, public relations/ communication practice.

In response to the question "If you were to change teaching jobs, what factors would be most influential in your decision? (Rank the top 3)", the most influential factor was "salary/ benefits" with 42 percent of the respondents citing it. "Location/geography" was of only slightly lesser importance (41.5%) and "personal/family" was chosen as the third most considered factor for 26.5 percent of the women. Twenty-five percent of the respondents checked "promotion/advancement" as being an influential factor. No respondent indicated that she would take the "first job offered".

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Our survey findings indicate that women who are currently teaching public relations in American colleges and universities are very satisfied with the classroom experience, the lifestyle that campus affords, and the psychic rewards that accompany teaching. They are less satisfied with many of the institutional and administrative components of their career choice. Additional problems arise from perceptions of their status within the

academic institution and of the opportunities for advancement, when compared to those of their male counterparts.

In profiling the women who teach public relations today, the authors have come to understand that these educators bring a wealth of experience to the classroom, rooted in many years of public relations practice. We have also seen strong evidence of a deep commitment to teaching and to working with the practitioners of tomorrow.

However, since the majority of these women spent their early career development years in the field, they are relatively inexperienced in the "groves of academe," confused and frustrated by the necessity to walk these unfamiliar paths of academic politics, research and publishing, tenure and promotion. Since relatively few of them have experienced the particular foibles of the academic world through the process of obtaining a doctoral degree, they have not yet had the opportunity to learn to deal with that world. And, finally, since they willingly, and seemingly deliberately, exchanged managerial positions in public relations practice for classroom teaching, moving into academic administration seems to carry little excitement or challenge, despite its potential to provide solutions to perceived problems.

This study makes no attempt to offer concrete programs for change; our purpose was simply to identify sources of satisfaction and concerns for women public relations educators. Nonetheless, the authors hope that by documenting these attitudes

toward teaching careers, they have provided a stimulus for continued discussion, a baseline for additional research, and guideposts for those who seek to recruit and retain women in public relations education.

APPENDIX

TABLE 1

Academic Rank	Percent
Instructor/Lecturer	25.7
Assistant Professor	50.4
Associate Professor	18.6
Professor	5.3

TABLE 2

Salary Range	Percent
$ 16-19,999	6.6
20-24,999	18.9
25-29,999	31.1
30-34,999	21.7
35-39,999	16.0
40-44,999	2.8
50,000 and over	2.8

TABLE 3

Tenure Status	Percent
Tenured	22.1
Non-tenured	77.9

TABLE 4

Race/Ethnic Identification	Percent
White	95.6
African-American	1.8
Hispanic	1.8
Native American	.9

TABLE 5

Highest Degree	Percent
BA/BS	6.2
MA/MS/MBA	50.4
PHD	35.4
EDD	6.2
JD	1.8

TABLE 6

Age	Percent
25-29	4.5
30-34	14.3
35-39	25.0
40-49	36.6
50-59	16.1
60-64	3.6

TABLE 7

PR Practitioner Before Teaching	Percent
Yes	84.8
No	15.2

TABLE 8

Currently Involved In PR Consulting	Percent
Yes	65.5
No	34.5

APPENDIX (con't)

TABLE 9

Organizational Membership	Percent
PRSA	22.5
AEJMC	21.4
IABC	6.1
SPJ	4.6
WICI	9.2
ICA	8.0
SCA	11.8
Other	16.4

(circle all that apply)

TABLE 10

Contribute Expertise To Community	Percent
Yes	83.3
No	16.7

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